

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Pushes For Medicaid Expansion and Disaster Recovery Dollars During First Meetings of Washington Visit, Gov't House Says

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Governor Albert Bryan has been in Washington advocating on behalf of the territory, with two heavy focuses being the expansion of Medicaid and funding for the territory's ongoing recovery effort during his first day of meetings in the nation's capital, Government House said Wednesday.

Mr. Bryan and members of his senior staff met with Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett and officials from the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Health and Human Services (HHS).

According to Government House, the governor and Ms. Plaskett discussed proposed legislation to avert the Medicaid fiscal cliff and the potential expansion of Ms. Plaskett's special visa waiver legislation during the Tuesday morning meeting.

During the meeting, Ms. Plaskett said the Territories Health Care Improvement Act proposes to grant a 100 percent federal medical assistance percentage (FMAP) to the U.S. Virgin Islands for fiscal year 2020. The bill also proposes an 83 percent FMAP for fiscal years 2021 through 2024 and 76 percent for fiscal year 2025.



Governor Bryan meets with House Majority Whip James Clyburn on Capitol Hill Tuesday. (Credit: Government House)

Mr. Bryan, who Government House said has for months lobbied Congress on this issue, also met with HHS Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan, Tuesday, where the governor stressed

the importance of the territory receiving the 100 percent FMAP.

In September, Governor Bryan penned a letter signed by the governors of each U.S. territory urging the U.S. Congress to extend the temporary 100 percent FMAP granted to the U.S. Virgin Islands and to provide the U.S. territories with the same need-based Medicaid funding that is currently available to the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Mr. Bryan said Tuesday he remains optimistic that Congress will extend the 100 percent FMAP past the November 21 deadline.

HUD

During his meeting on Tuesday morning with HUD Assistant Secretary David Woll Jr., Mr. Bryan discussed the progress of critical recovery projects funded through HUD's Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery CDBG-DR program, according to Government House.

The territory's leader also reiterated the need for HUD to expedite its completion of the grant agreement for tranche 2 of the CDBG-DR.



Governor Albert Bryan Jr. meets with HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary David Woll, Jr., Tuesday in Washington, D.C. (Credit: Government House)

In his discussion with Mr. Woll and the other HUD officials present, Mr. Bryan spoke to some of the recovery projects already underway and emphasized that some of those

projects approved in tranche 1 are also partly funded in tranche 2. Mr. Bryan cited an approved project to purchase four new generating units by the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) as an example of one of those projects, Government House said.

The project, which has an approved cost of \$90 million, calls for \$45 million from tranche 1 and \$45 million from tranche 2.

Mr. Bryan said Tuesday that HUD should not require the territory to spend the majority of the \$243 million in tranche 1 before the agency completes the grant agreement to release the \$779 million in tranche 2 when projects are being funded across the four tranches of CDBG-DR.

HUD approved an action plan for tranche 2 of the CDBG-DR submitted by the Government of the Virgin Islands in March 2019. However, the availability of the \$779 million in tranche 2 remains contingent on HUD completing the grant agreement.

Government House said Mr. Woll, before the end of Tuesday's meeting, assured Mr. Bryan that the completion of the grant agreement for tranche 2 of the CDBG-DR was a top priority for HUD.

The chief executive also met with Department of Interior Secretary David Bernhardt and Assistant Secretary Doug Domenech Tuesday and with House Majority Whip James Clyburn.

Feature Image: Governor Bryan meets with HHS Deputy Secretary Eric Hargan at DHHS Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Tuesday. (Credit: Government House)